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## Move forest bill through Senate

**T**he U.S. House of Representatives should be commended for passing a piece of legislation this week that would begin to tackle the conditions in forests that lead to catastrophic forest fires.

### THE ISSUE:

Congressman Greg Walden's Healthy Forests Restoration Act has passed the House.

### WE SUGGEST:

Our Oregon senators should help keep the ball rolling on this important piece of legislation.

### YOUR RESPONSE:

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**THE HOUSE** passed the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, 256-170, with bipartisan support. The bill was co-authored and promoted by our 2nd District congressman, Greg Walden.

The legislation, if it gets through the Senate after the Memorial Day recess, would not bring an instant end to devastating wildfires. But it would be a significant start in addressing the problem.

Wildfires consumed 7 million acres last year, including 1 million in Oregon. The House bill would allow thinning of up to 20 million acres of publicly owned forests. That only scratches the surface of the more than 190 million acres of land that are at high risk for fires, disease and bug infestations.

**CLEARING FORESTS** of fuel loads that cause fires to ignite and spread rapidly should seem like a no-brainer to most Americans. It's not so easy to accomplish, however, considering the red-tape the government must go through before a project begins and the eagerness of environmental groups to thwart such projects. Walden's bill attempts to address both of these issues. The U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management would still have to conduct an environmental analysis of thinning projects, but not of a full range of alternatives to the proposal. Citizen lawsuits would have to be filed within 15 days of project proposal release. Judicial restraining orders would be limited to 45 days.

The bill has the potential to help the economies of rural communities like La Grande by creating a \$25 million grant program to encourage energy generation from wood, brush and other forest debris.

**THE HEALTHY FORESTS** act will not sail through the Senate as easily as it did through the House. Controversial issues, such as whether large, valuable, fire-resistant trees should be harvested to pay for thinning projects will need to be resolved.

Still, our Oregon senators, Republican Gordon Smith and Democrat Ron Wyden, should do what they can to make sure the Healthy Forests Restoration Act does not languish or die in the Senate. Americans cannot sit by for several more summers and watch their valuable forests burn up because no one can agree on fire-prevention measures.